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LETTER DATED 20 JUNE 1997 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

As you are aware, the security situation in Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of the Congo, has become extremely precarious, with serious implications for peace and stability, not only for the Congo, but also for the subregion. The violent fighting that erupted on 5 June 1997 between armed elements controlled by President Lissouba and Mr. Sassou-Nguesso, the former President, has already claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians in Brazzaville. The humanitarian situation in the city and in some other areas of the country has worsened significantly. As the violence engulfed most of the city, the expatriate community, including United Nations staff, had to be evacuated with the help of international forces.

In view of the gravity of the situation, heads of State and Government of the subregion, under the chairmanship of President Bongo of Gabon, have established an International Mediation Committee aimed at reaching agreement on a ceasefire and settlement of the present crisis in the Congo. The efforts of the Committee, which were actively assisted by the Special Representative of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the region, Ambassador Sahnoun, have resulted in a temporary ceasefire. At a meeting convened at Libreville, on 16 June 1997, the International Mediation Committee requested the United Nations Security Council to authorize the rapid deployment to Brazzaville of an inter-African force.

This request was conveyed to me by President Bongo in a letter dated 16 June 1997. President Bongo, who has been mediating the talks between the parties, has also conveyed a similar written request to you (S/1997/483, annex), indicating that the Committee has obtained the agreement to the deployment of an inter-African force of all Congolese parties concerned, as well as their assurances that they would cooperate with such a force. It should be stressed that the agreement of the parties to the deployment and their adherence to an agreed cease-fire are indispensable conditions for the deployment of an international force, as is the condition that the proposed force should control the airport.

The proposed force would aim at assuring the implementation of the ceasefire and contribute as much as possible to the establishment of an environment appropriate for the preparation and good conduct of the presidential

elections in the country. The Committee has also agreed to refer the request to the Central Organ of OAU so that it can consider assisting the operation.

One option for the formation and deployment of such a force is that a group of Member States would decide to establish and contribute to a multinational force and to seek the authorization of the Security Council to do so. The second option would be to deploy a United Nations peacekeeping force, composed mainly of African contingents provided with adequate military capability and with sufficient financial and logistical support to fulfil the challenging tasks entrusted to it. Given the gravity of the crisis and the experience of the international community in dealing with similar situations, it is estimated that the initial size of the force should be not less than battalion group strength, i.e., approximately 1,600 to 1,800 troops, with the necessary support units (400 to 800 men), plus United Nations military observers. A force of that size would have the capacity to secure the airport, it being understood that wider deployment would require greater strength.

Experience has shown that a force of that size and configuration could be fully deployed only with adequate preparation, which would require sufficient time. However, delays in deployment could adversely affect the fragile ceasefire arrangements mediated by the International Mediation Committee.

While the States of the region and other Member States concerned continue to discuss the modalities, including the composition, structure, command and control and other requirements for such a force, I believe it would be important for the international community to take urgent steps in support of this regional initiative.

In the circumstances, and in order to avoid the creation of a vacuum, I intend, subject to the concurrence and authorization of the Security Council, as well as agreement by the Congolese parties, to request countries with proven military capability to dispatch to Brazzaville an advance military detachment to be entrusted with the establishment of a secure environment for the deployment of the eventual force. Such an advance detachment would operate under command and control arrangements agreed between potential contributors and would also include a limited number of United Nations military observers to provide liaison with the warring parties and to verify the ceasefire. The advance military detachment could consist of troops fielded by regional States as well as by other Member States, especially those who could ensure rapid deployment and adequate logistical support. In view of the positive role played by the French troops in Brazzaville in recent weeks, their support would be highly desirable during this transitional phase. The United Nations would also be ready to provide, on a temporary basis, 40 to 50 military observers who could be drawn from existing United Nations peacekeeping operations to be deployed to Brazzaville on short notice.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN